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[Notes supplementary to the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science.—No. 6.]

WORK AMONG WORKINGWOMEN IN BALTIMORE.[1]

A SOCIAL STUDY.

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One of the practical lessons derived from the recent organized inquiry of Johns Hopkins University men into the history of co-operation in the United States is that the failure of most attempts at productive co-operation, on the part of the working classes, is due to ignorance and the lack of good management. These radical faults will continue as long as working people are content to trust to agitation and spasmodic organization instead of to education and intelligent direction.

One of the best signs of the times is the disposition of working men and women in our large cities to learn something and to do something for their own mental and moral improvement. An interesting result of an unsuccessful attempt to establish a co-operative shirt factory in Baltimore is the present growing interest of a large company of working girls in education and discussion. Under the direction of a capable and energetic forewoman in one of our large manufactories, a society has been formed for the study of history. The idea was absolutely original with the girls, and they have been working it out in their own way with such kindly co-operation as a few Baltimore ladies have been able to offer.

Upon a plan somewhat resembling that adopted in missionary societies for reporting the progress of work in various fields, the working girls of Baltimore, under the intelligent leadership of their forewoman, have distributed a few historic countries and cities among certain committees, for private study and public report. One section of the club began a co-operative study of United States history. Another undertook to grapple with the republican development of modern France. A third group plunged

[1] An interesting article on "Clubs for Working Girls," by the Hon. Maude Stanley, may be found in the "Nineteenth Century" for January, 1889. The author says: "Clubs for working girls are one of the most modern of all schemes; but the rapid spread of such institutions, in less than ten years, over England, Scotland and America, shows how greatly they were needed. They meet a want which can be met in no other way; they enlist the sympathy of the upper classes, whilst they gain the confidence of the working classes." An article by Helen Campbell on the Young Women's Christian Association of New York, under the title "Certain Forms of Work for Women," may be found in The Century Magazine for June, 1889.

boldly into the municipal history of Italy, which must have proved as rich and wonderful a discovery as was America to the Genoese navigator. When a committee was ready to report on Venice or Genoa, Rome or Florence, or any other subject, an evening was set apart for that particular topic. Each appointee made her own special contribution to the common fund of historical interest. The club is a kind of girls' senate for the discussion of foreign relations and home affairs.

The members were materially aided by young ladies and teachers in town who lent them books, maps, photographs, which served to illustrate the *conversazione.* In the opinion of both participants and occasional observers, the experiment is a surprising success. The main point is that the girls are greatly interested in what they are doing, and are mentally improved and enlightened. They have been meeting every week since the spring of 1887. They continued their sessions without assistance during the hot weather, which, in Baltimore, is a sufficient test of staying power. They have learned to appreciate, in some slight degree at least, the value of historical study as compared with sensational novel-reading. Some of the members, it is said, are moved with pity for girls who waste all their spare time over weak and frivolous stories, when it is possible to learn something about one's own country and the nineteenth century. This mental position represents, perhaps, something of an intellectual gain for persons who two years ago had never looked into a history of the United States.

It will be observed that the whole experiment is both spontaneous and co-operative. It began among working girls. Their plan from the outset was based upon the sound economic principle of division of labor and the combination of results. While the club enlisted the willing co-operation of certain intelligent young ladies in Baltimore, who introduced not only good literature but also good habits of saving money, it is distinctly understood that the management remains in the hands of the active members and their forewoman. By their invitation, occasional lectures have been given by lady teachers of history from uptown schools; but, in the main, the experiment has been upon the basis of self-help.

The club meets in a plain room, or "local," hired for the purpose, and has a working library of good books. The leader, who evolved the idea of the club from her own brain as she sat "studying" before a fire, cherishes the ideal of a working girls' club-house, with evening classes for instruction and social improvement. Her interest in her chosen cause is said by a lady who knows her to be "singularly womanly." "Her realization of her own responsibility toward the young girls in her workroom—sometimes eighty in number—her burden of care with regard to their advancement physically, morally, and intellectually, is certainly remarkable in a self-trained girl of twenty-two." This educational experiment by working girls is an interesting phenomenon. It will serve as an introduction to the following review of another and larger field of useful work among workingwomen in Baltimore.

In the year 1883 was incorporated the Young Women's Christian Association, "for the improvement and education of young women, having in view the improvement of the condition of the workingwomen of Baltimore, by providing for them a reading-room, and such other departments as may be found necessary." This institution has now been in successful operation for six years. A brief review of its work is not without educational and sociological interest.

The Association was organized by thoughtful Christian ladies of Baltimore, with an advisory board of gentlemen. Besides the usual executive officers, there were standing committees for the lunch-room, library, entertainment, educational and religious instruction, increase of membership, visiting, fresh-air excursions, etc. The annual reports of these various committees are suggestive sources of information concerning the character and progress of the various lines of work. A careful study of these reports has been supplemented by personal conference with members of the Association.

The first practical work done by the Young Women's Christian Association in Baltimore was to rent two rooms over a shop in Lexington street, one of the business thoroughfares, along which are numerous stores employing saleswomen. A kitchen and a lunch-room were at once established, and here the wife of a university professor made the first soup. It was originally intended to provide every day a simple lunch of soup, tea or coffee, bread and butter; but gradually such simple meats and vegetables as could be sold for five cents a portion were added to the bill of fare. The first day the lunch-room was opened it was patronized by only four persons. The second day there were ten. At the end of the first week there had been ninety-three meals served; at the end of the second week, 163; at the end of the first year, 17,865; at the end of the third year, 21,297; at the end of the fourth year, 29,000; at the end of the fifth year, 43,020. Among the first results noticed by the committee were the gratitude of the girls, their improved health and appearance. Some of the girls spoke of the comfort of leaving the store for a half-hour and getting a warm meal. Others spoke of "the nervous headaches kept off by the soup or cup of coffee and the little rest in the parlor afterwards."

The means for supporting the lunch-room came partly from the girls, who cheerfully paid the small charges for what they took, and partly from generous donations by friends of the enterprise. Gentlemen connected with the Corn and Flour Exchange sent barrels of flour, etc. The committee on the lunch-room never ran into debt. They kept the prices of food as low as possible, and their enterprise is now practically self-sustaining, which is a gratifying economic result. The patronage of the lunch-room by working girls has been so great that the Association has twice been compelled to change its quarters in order to secure more commodious dining-rooms. The present building, 221 Liberty street, is neat and attractive, but evidently too small for the growing and helpful work which the

Association has undertaken. Good food is, and always has been, a good physical basis for social work. It promotes good-will and healthful, cordial co-operation among members of any society.

The supply of home-cooked food to working girls for their midday meal naturally led to a demand for temporary board and lodgings on the part of girls who had been thrown out of work, or who had come to the city from a distance seeking employment, but with little ready money. Next to food, shelter and security are social necessities. These the lodging-house committees endeavored to supply, with the aid of a competent and trustworthy matron. Upon application, any respectable young woman was admitted to one night's lodging for fifteen cents. If she wished to stay longer, she was required to furnish references, and promise conformance to the rules of the house.

The few rooms at command in the early experience of the Association made it impossible to shelter more than six persons at a time. The third year the committee furnished 1,044 nights' lodgings. There were, however, only 139 different lodgers. The fourth year, in the new Home on Liberty street, where there is room for 27 guests, 3,465 lodgings were afforded, but the total number of individual guests was only 100. In 1887 there was 114 transient and 47 permanent boarders, the cost of board being $2.50 per week. These facts indicate a tendency on the part of the girls to take up their abode at the Home of the Association, a fact manifestly explained by its economy and general attractiveness. Cheerful surroundings, marks of good taste in furniture and adornment—these things have a positive educational value. Great care, however, should be taken, on the one hand, not to allow an abuse of privilege, and, on the other, to develop higher standards of living among working girls outside the Home.

One interesting feature of the lodging-rooms is that they have been furnished by contributions from young ladies' schools, by industrial associations, or in memory of good women whose influence lives on in the Young Women's Christian Association. Speaking of the attractions of the Home on Liberty street, the managers once said: "We deem it no little thing that our friends have made it beautiful, and that its memorial rooms grace it with tender associations. In a home a pure sentiment is ever a fitting guest, and with us whatever inspires a home feeling and tends to create a softening and elevating influence becomes an educational force of significant value."

Very attractive are the rooms devoted to literary and social purposes. The library, which was begun by a donation of books from a now discontinued night school, is well supplied with books and magazines. The library is furnished in memory of Miss White, a young lady who from the first was actively engaged in promoting the interests of the Association. The parlor also is a memorial room, and opens directly into the library. The walls of both rooms are hung with good pictures, and the furniture is suggestive of quiet comfort. When the writer visited these rooms, accompanied by one

of the lady managers, he saw a shop-girl practising upon the piano in the parlor. She told the lady, in answer to a question, that she had finished her work early that day in the straw-shop, and had chosen this form of recreation quite by herself. A utilitarian might perhaps have suggested a more profitable form of enjoyment during leisure hours; but is there really any finer pleasure than music for the working classes? Surely they need it, and perhaps appreciate it quite as much as do those who neither toil nor spin. Even the slaves on the old plantations were not denied the use of the banjo and the violin. Shall not women who were born free cultivate all the musical talent which they possess?

In the use of the library it is said that there is a decided preference for fiction. This fact only goes to show that working girls are not altogether different from other girls. Compared with fiction, history and biography and other forms of literature will forever occupy a lower place in popular favor. Good stories and good music are at once the joy, solace, and inspiration of modern democracy. Good taste in the choice of novels, as in other reading, is one of the best criterions of intellectual and moral progress. In this regard it is said that there has been marked improvement among those who frequent the Association rooms. A member of the library committee is present every day to advise and assist the girls in their selection of literature. In no way, perhaps, can cultivated ladies render more valuable educational service to their sex than in developing higher standards of literary taste and in providing well-selected libraries for clubs of working girls.

The improvement of members of the Association in dress and deportment is remarked in the reports of the Library Committee. This is, naturally, due to the personal influence and example of the lady managers. Good taste in habits of person, dress, and conduct is characteristic of civilized life. It is the thousand and one things of manner and speech that mark the progress of a human being from ignorance to cultivation, from rudeness to refinement. Among other helpful forms of teaching, the managers have endeavored to interest the girls in the useful arts of dressmaking and of letter-writing. Those who wish to learn the first accomplishment are required to pay a fee of fifty cents. The class in dressmaking has been well patronized. After lunch the girls have been frequently entertained and instructed in social groups by the reading of specimen letters. In the evening, pleasant companies of young women have been brought together for social enjoyment. A reception committee of ladies is always present to welcome strangers. By quotation parties, readings, recitations, musicales, magic lantern exhibitions, social games, followed by simple refreshments, the leisure hours of working girls have been made more cheerful. Perhaps life itself has taken a brighter hue through the opening of such pleasant vistas of human interest in this world of toil. One of the best fruits of the social spirit is the working girls' Christmas. They have their tree, their carols, and their presents for one another, every girl contributing something useful or pretty, not costing over five cents.

The educating influence of the Young Women's Christian Association has been chiefly social and practical, as it should be. Classes in reading, writing, bookkeeping, and singing were early instituted, and have been maintained with more or less interest and success. English literature has been taught in simple and effective ways, by reading aloud from good authors to appreciative groups of young women, and also by introducing the coöperative method of reading, one girl taking one book by a given author, another girl another book, and all reporting on their individual readings to the assembled class. The girls have been taught, to some extent, the art of composition by writing from dictation, and by studying good models. Correct speech is developed, not by the learning of many grammatical rules, but by the correction of concrete faults and by constant practice in the art of expression. There are no better products of education for workingwomen, or for women in general, than ability to read well, write well, and talk well. A good voice well trained, good penmanship, ability to spell and to use the English language—these are things which the best schools, colleges, and universities often fail to teach. So rare are all these accomplishments, in proper combination, that they may be said to be among the lost arts. Their attempted revival by educated people for the elevation of the working classes is one of the healthiest signs of our times. Among other useful arts, new and old, now being taught to working girls in Baltimore are typewriting and bodily exercise. One lady has taught "knitting to a class of twelve little cash-girls, who greatly desired to learn this womanly industry." One of the most practical of educating influences is in the direction of business thrift. A station of the Provident Savings Bank has been opened at the rooms of the Young Women's Christian Association, and the number of depositors increases every week.

Religious instruction has been given from the outset, in a Sunday afternoon Bible class. On Thursday evening there is usually a meeting of a social and religious nature. Often some officer of the Association receives young girls in the parlor, offering them a social cup of tea and such Christian sympathy and counsel as they may need. The simplicity, friendliness, and genuineness of this social work are its greatest charms. So fond of the place and its associations are the working girls that they keep up these Thursday evening meetings throughout the hot weather.

The plan adopted in 1887 by the Committee on Membership for the development of the Association is so intelligent and suggestive that it is here appended as a useful means of propaganda in other town and cities: "The plan determined upon was as follows: A lady was appointed to represent each church, whose duty it should be to go through her congregation telling them about the Christian Association and soliciting their interest. In order to facilitate this, printed slips were pasted in the front of the subscription books, stating the object of the work. Printed cards were also prepared, giving a list of the different branches of the work then existing. It was further recommended that these ladies should form auxiliaries in

their churches of twelve others, who should report to them, and through them to the central committee. The list of the churches and their representatives obtained in this way nine Baptist, one Christian, one Congregational, one Evangelical Association, four Society of Friends, four Lutheran, ten Methodist Episcopal, four Methodist Independent, fifteen Presbyterian, twelve Protestant Episcopal, three Reformed Episcopal, one Unitarian, two Reformed Church; in all, seventy churches, coming from every part of the city. The next step taken was to form a sub-committee whose duty it should be to visit every place in the city of Baltimore employing women. Several ladies volunteered for this work, which was so well done that in one month the cards of the Association had been placed in the hands of most of the heads of factories and other houses, together employing over three thousand women. The forewomen had been personally interviewed and solicited to join and work with us; printed blanks had been given to these ladies, and were intelligently filled up, stating the places visited and much valuable information about the work of the women employed, that will be of great use, in different ways, to our Association. It is only just to say that we should bear testimony to the self-sacrifice shown by these ladies who undertook the most difficult task. Coming as it did, just at the time of the strikes, there was much to overcome in obtaining the information which they sought. Cards were next sent to the railroad stations, and the matrons were asked to direct young girls to the lodging-house. The intelligence office in the city also received the cards kindly, and promised to call the attention of women above servants to our employment bureau. And Marshal Frey, of the Central Police Station, was further interviewed, given cards, and told what class of girls the Association could help. . . . The next step toward spreading the work, it is hoped, will be through girls' clubs, formed in different parts of the city, by ladies living at convenient distances from those working women and girls who need our sympathy and and help, and yet are too far away to attend the library, night classes, etc., at the central house."

The managers of the Young Women's Christian Association have from the beginning made a systematic effort to secure employment for girls who are out of work. A member of the Employment Committee is in daily attendance at the office from 10 A. M. until 2 P. M., to meet and talk with applicants. After a careful scrutiny of their references and friendly inquiry into their exact wants and qualifications, the representative of the committee gives the needed advice. Every year, through the recommendations of this experienced committee, knowing the best employers in the city, several hundred girls secure good situations and become self-supporting. The very best way of helping people is to enable them to help themselves. During the year 1887 there were 435 applications for employment, and positions were secured for 174. Of these, five were employed as companions, one is a housekeeper, fourteen as attendants on invalids, twenty-three as nurses, three as teachers, one as a copyist, two as folders, one as a hatmaker, two

as saleswomen, and eighty-six as seamstresses. The Association is steadily growing in the confidence of the business community as a trustworthy agency through which to secure competent female labor.

Another excellent branch of committee work is to see that girls who come to the lunch-rooms have proper boarding-places. Ladies visit girls in their lodgings. A female physician has lent her services in caring for the sick, and has made herself very useful to her sex by keeping a careful watch upon the sanitary condition of shops where girls are employed. By calling attention to the simplest rules of hygiene, a friendly physician can often prevent physical breakdown or the spread of disease. Lectures on the laws of health have been given to the girls at the Association rooms, Provision has been made for the proper care of girls in the hospital, and for taking the sick to "Sea Rest," near Atlantic City. Some time ago a Fresh Air Fund was instituted by the proceeds of parlor concerts, increased by subscriptions. By the aid of this Fund working girls are enabled to get a glimpse of the country or seashore for a week or two in hot weather. Parties are now and then taken upon a railway trip to the beautiful heights of Pen Mar, the western boundary of Maryland. On one occasion 450 working girls went together on a moon-light excursion by steamer down the Chesapeake Bay. Frequently small parties are given an outing upon the water. Thus in simple and inexpensive ways is the life of the working girls in Baltimore made more healthful and enjoyable through the Young Women's Christian Association.

A flourishing branch is the Helping Hand Society, an organization suggested by Miss Grace Dodge, of New York, who, in February, 1887, gave a talk to Baltimore ladies upon the subject of working girls' clubs. Three of the ladies afterward visited the factories in East Baltimore, made the acquaintance of some of the girls there employed, and invited them to meet at the Women's Christian Temperance Rooms, on Baltimore Street, for the discussion of the idea of forming a girls' society. About fifteen came to this preliminary meeting. Tea was served, and the plan was agreeably explained. All who wished to join the proposed society were requested to come again the following Thursday. Fourteen came to the second meeting, and the club was duly organized for the instruction and pleasure of its members. By the advice of Miss Dodge, no effort was made at first to attract a large number of girls. A social enterprise which draws a crowd often lacks the proper basis for real and permanent usefulness. The great mistake which social reformers sometimes make in dealing with working men and women is to approach them collectively instead of individually. The Helping Hand Society was duly organized upon an economic basis, with monthly dues of five cents. Meetings were held weekly in cool weather, and monthly during the summer months. The girls were encouraged to play games and to take part in informal discussions upon such topics as "Spring Clothes and What to Buy," "Emergencies and How to Meet Them," etc. One day in June the lady president of the society invited all

the girls to visit her beautiful home in the country. It was the first experience of the kind for some of these wage-earners from the city, and was greatly enjoyed by all.

For the first six months the Society continued to meet in the Women's Temperance rooms, but, appreciating the need of a more convenient place of assembly for its flourishing branch, the Young Women's Christian Association voted an appropriation of $25 a month to the Helping Hand Society for the purpose of enabling it to rent a small house at No. 18 High Street, in East Baltimore. Here may been seen two pleasantly furnished rooms, a parlor and a class-room. The lodging-house features of the parent association were copied upon a smaller scale under the charge of an experienced matron; but such accommodations have not proved really necessary in East Baltimore, where cheap board and respectable lodgings can be found on every hand. The best features of this "East End" work are educational, social, musical, moral, and religious. Classes have been instituted in penmanship, fancy-work, and cookery. One young lady, who had been studying botany in town under scientific and social auspices, repeated with great success the lessons she had learned, before a class of working girls, who were particularly pleased with their teacher's skilful drawing upon the blackboard and with an opportunity to study the nature of flowers and plants. A piano has been presented to the Helping Hand Society, and the girls have shown themselves very fond of music. The Society consists now of about one hundred members, and the interest continues unabated.

A second branch of the Young Women's Christian Association was established in February, 1888, in a western quarter of Baltimore, at Hope Chapel, in Laurens Street, near Pennsylvania Avenue. It is called a "Lend a Hand Society." For economy's sake it has rented Hope Chapel for one evening in the week. The society has about twenty-five members, who meet as a sewing class for conversation and social improvement. They make garments and distribute them among needy people, whom the girls themselves select. This development of a helpful, unselfish spirit among girls who are themselves being helped, consciously or unconsciously, is one of the most encouraging fruits of the Young Women's Christian Association. In one instance a working girl offered her services every evening to teach the children of a poor woman in the neighborhood, whose entire household had to work all day for their daily bread. Such a spirit of intelligent usefulness is developed by these societies that it should be recognized as one of the modern forms of applied Christianity. It is like seed falling on good ground, springing up, and bearing fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold.

COMPARATIVE STATISTICS RELATING TO 936 WORKINGWOMEN OF BALTIMORE.

[*From the Fourth Annual Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Labor.*]

INQUIRIES.	Baltimore.	Results for 22 Cities combined.
Number of workingwomen reported upon	936	17,427
Average age (years and months)	22–11	22–7
Average age at beginning work (years and months)	15–9	15–4
Average time (years and months) in present occupation	10–10.7	4–9.7
Native born	864	14,127
Foreign born	72	3,300
With native born father	454	4,412
With foreign born father	472	12,904
Birthplace of father not reported	10	111
With native born mother	508	4,929
With foreign born mother	421	12,406
Birthplace of mother not reported	7	92
Unmarried	816	15,387
Per cent. unmarried	87.18	88.29
Married	46	745
Widowed	60	1,038
Divorced	1	43
Separated	13	214
The present occupation the first	571	9,540
Worked at one previous occupation	269	5,508
Worked at two previous occupations	75	1,765
Worked at three previous occupations	15	457
Worked at four previous occupations	5	113
Worked at five previous occupations	1	32
Worked at six previous occupations	.....	12
Living at home	786	14,918
Not living at home	150	2,509
Per cent. living at home	83.97	85.60
Families reported upon	801	13,355
Total persons in said families	4,278	70,100
Average persons in a family	5.34	5.25
Total workers in said families	2,260	33,132
Average workers in a family	2.82	2.48
Families in which some member owns house	163	2,470
Condition of health at age of beginning work:		
Good	867	16,360
Fair	55	882
Bad	14	185
Condition of health during previous occupation:		
Good	326	7,129
Fair	30	622
Bad	9	136

Inquiries.	Baltimore.	Results for 22 Cities combined.
Condition of health now:		
Good	730	14,555
Fair	161	2,387
Bad	45	485
Educated in		
American public schools	735	*a* 10,456
Other schools	159	*a* 5,375
Not reported	42	*a* 882
Church attendance:		
Attend church	688	*a* 13,998
Do not attend church	232	*a* 2,309
Not reported	16	*a* 406
Home condition:		
Comfortable	684	*a* 12,020
Poor	252	*a* 4,693
Shop condition:		
Well cared for	846	*a* 14,966
Neglected	90	*a* 1,747
Workingwomen reporting yearly earnings, but not expenses:		
Number	761	13,822
Average days lost in year	37.9	36.0
Average earnings per year	$217.60	$272.45
Average earnings per week	$4.18	$5.24
Workingwomen reporting both yearly income and yearly expenses:		
Number	386	5,716
Average yearly income from regular occupation,	$248.45	$295.54
Average yearly expenses for room and meals	$136.66	$162.06
Average yearly expenses for clothing	$66.43	$79.06

a. These figures are for 20 cities only.

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